

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHAC #0819/01 2761618
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 031618Z OCT 07
FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6242
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS ASUNCION 000819

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

PASS TO WHA/BSC

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [IAHRC](#) [PA](#)
SUBJECT: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES STRUGGLE FOR RECOGNITION

11. (U) SUMMARY: Hundreds of indigenous persons earned land concessions from the government August 3 and September 24 after commandeering Asuncion's two most popular parks, the latest in a series of indigenous efforts to promote land rights and resource preservation. Indigenous groups comprise a small percentage of the population, and most live in extreme poverty with limited access to basic needs such as food and potable water. Indigenous groups frequently complain of lands rights abuses and their inability to obtain land. They remain politically disenfranchised in spite of their contributions to Paraguayan culture, and government efforts at direct assistance to the indigenous population have been hampered by scarce resources and the lack of political will. Although proposed changes to the law protecting indigenous persons may enhance indigenous groups' political and legal standing, they may not be sufficient to defuse the growing number of indigenous protests. Aid organizations have helped improve living conditions in indigenous communities; however, the future of Paraguay's indigenous depends largely on government action. END SUMMARY.

INDIGENOUS ACTION

12. (U) Over 370 persons earned land concessions from the government August 3 and September 24 after commandeering Asuncion's two most popular parks. Two indigenous groups, the Mbya and the Ache Chupapou, lived illegally between June and September in Plazas Italia and Uruguay in order to protest their lack of access to land. The last of the protesters departed Asuncion in late September after the Institute of the Indigenous (INDI), the government agency responsible for indigenous affairs, promised to allocate land to indigenous groups in Canindeyu Department. INDI President Augusto Fogel announced September 24 that INDI had agreed to purchase 295 hectares of land for USD 200,000 on behalf of the Mbya. The press reported that INDI agreed to temporarily reassign the Mbya -- who camped for four months in Plaza Uruguay -- to existing indigenous communities until they can be permanently resettled in Canindeyu. Hundreds of members of the Ache Chupapou group lived in Plaza Italia for three months and departed August 3 after the government allocated an additional USD 300,000 to INDI to purchase 2,000 hectares for them.

13. (U) Indigenous leaders began organizing themselves politically in 2006 to promote land rights and resource preservation. Indigenous leaders established the National Indigenous Movement (NIM) in August 2006 to promote indigenous rights; however, candidates representing NIM failed to win a single seat in the November 2006 municipal elections. According to Director of Indigenous Issues Noelia Boggino of the Public Defender's office, indigenous persons have increasingly taken to protesting in order to demand land rights. (NOTE: These protests come at a significant cost to

the municipalities. The government spent several thousand dollars cleaning up Plaza Italia and Plaza Uruguay in the aftermath of the protests. END NOTE.)

INDIGENOUS CONDITIONS

¶4. (U) Paraguay's indigenous groups comprise 1.7 percent of the total population, and most live in extreme poverty with limited access to basic needs such as food, medicine, and potable water. According to the 2002 census, 87,099 indigenous persons were affiliated with five linguistic families -- the Guaraní, Zamucó, Maskóy Mataguayo, Guaicurú, and Lengua Maskóy -- organized into 20 different officially recognized ethnic sub-groups. Most subsist as farmers, fishermen, or laborers for Mennonite communities in the Chaco. Antonio Alonso of the NGO National Coordinator of the Pastoral Indigenous (CONAPI) told EmbOff in July that over 98 percent of the indigenous population earns less than one dollar per day, rendering most unable to meet such basic survival needs as food, shelter, and sanitation. Only 2.5 percent has access to potable water, and only 9.7 percent has access to electricity. Over 90 percent are illiterate, and most lack adequate access to social services such as healthcare and education.

¶5. (U) Indigenous groups frequently complain of lands rights abuses and their inability to obtain land. Indigenous fishers and farmers suffer from land and resource degradation by non-indigenous persons who illegally harvest fish or deforest indigenous lands through logging or soy cultivation. Lack of access to sufficient land hinders indigenous groups' ability to progress economically and maintain their cultural identity. In addition, many indigenous persons cannot travel to the capital to solicit land titles from INDI. Although the 1992 constitution allocates 100 hectares of land to each indigenous family, most own little or no land, and those that do often do not hold the legal title and therefore risk having their land taken from them. Non-indigenous persons routinely push indigenous families off their land without compensation. Although the constitution prohibits the rent or sale of indigenous lands, non-indigenous persons frequently offer alcohol or other commercial goods to indigenous persons in exchange for the illegal use of their ancestral lands.

PARAGUAYAN GOVERNMENT INACTION

¶6. (U) Indigenous groups remain politically disenfranchised in spite of their contributions to Paraguayan culture. The Guaraní -- the largest indigenous group comprised of six different ethnic sub-groups -- are a symbol of national unity as Guaraní is one of the country's two official languages and the name of its currency. Historically, the government has either ignored or impinged on the rights of its indigenous population. In fact, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (CIDH) convicted Paraguay of violating six articles of the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights in February 2005. The Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IDH) consequently sentenced the Paraguayan government to pay reparations in the amount of USD 36,169 to two indigenous communities, provide assistance such as healthcare, and return ancestral lands. The government made feeble attempts to reallocate land to indigenous communities, but subsequent reparations and other assistance such as education, healthcare, and labor rights remain inadequate. Although the IDH ruling did not improve living conditions for the indigenous communities involved, it did hold Paraguay legally accountable for human rights infractions associated with its treatment of the indigenous.

¶7. (U) Government efforts at direct assistance to the indigenous population have been hampered by scarce resources and the lack of political will. The government channels most of its support -- USD 2.07 million in 2007 -- for the

indigenous population through agencies such as INDI and the Public Defender's office, which handles complaints involving indigenous rights. The Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock provides seeds to indigenous communities for cultivation, while the Ministry of Education and Culture administers "Escuelaviva," a program which distributes educational materials to indigenous communities. However, Boggino of the Public Defender's office told PolOff that the government lacked the political will and adequate funding to support these programs. CONAPI Representative Alonso noted to EmbOff in July that the Agriculture Ministry did not effectively train indigenous aid recipients to cultivate crops. He also stated that Escuelaviva did not provide funding for teacher training to help teachers use the program's educational materials.

¶8. (U) Although proposed changes to the law protecting indigenous persons may enhance indigenous groups' political and legal standing, they may not be sufficient to defuse the growing number of indigenous protests. Oscar Ayala and Maria Julia Cabello of Tierraviva, an NGO that specializes in indigenous land rights, told EmbOff that the revised law could grant special consideration to indigenous persons involved in land disputes and would create the National Council of the Indigenous (NCI) to represent the entire indigenous community, improving coordination on key indigenous issues such as land rights and political representation.

AID EFFORTS CONTINUE

¶9. (U) Aid organizations, including NGOs and faith-based groups, have helped improve living conditions in indigenous communities. Catholic groups provide clothing, food, and agricultural assistance. Mennonite groups furnish seeds and technical assistance to indigenous communities in the Chaco. UNICEF funded well construction to provide potable water for indigenous communities in the Department of Boqueron. Oguasu, with INDI's assistance, reached out to approximately 700 indigenous persons -- many of whom were involved in drugs and prostitution -- to reintegrate them into local communities. The NGO Community and Sustainable Development (CODES) broke ground in July 2007 on a housing project that will provide homes for 15 indigenous families in the Department of Itapua. CODES plans to build up to 179 homes for indigenous families with the assistance of the Paraguayan government. In conjunction with this project, CODES will build health centers, schools, and wells, and offer indigenous communities advice on improving sanitation, nutrition, and agricultural productivity.

COMMENT

¶10. (U) The future of Paraguay's indigenous depends largely on government action. Indigenous protests in urban areas for land rights and against deforestation are increasingly common. The government could assuage indigenous groups by helping them organize within the political system and by enforcing their constitutionally guaranteed right to land. The government agency INDI could also better coordinate aid efforts with local municipalities and organizations that have been more effective at alleviating indigenous poverty. In the absence of government support, indigenous groups will have few other outlets to express their frustration than to protest.

Please visit us at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/asuncion>
CASON